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ART. VII. *Speeches in Congress, as published in the Newspapers ; 1826, 1827.*

THE range of the human mind is almost infinite, but the particular departments to which it may be directed, especially in most branches of literature, will sooner or later be filled, and no resort remain but to repetition. Some critics have asserted, for instance, that epic poems, which would be read, can no longer be produced. Homer, Virgil, Milton, Tasso, and Camoens, without citing more recent names, have exhausted the process. Tragedy also has no field untouched, and though the French, with their crowds of theatre-going idlers, now and then sustain a new one for a few nights, by the aid of an occasional political allusion, which seriously alarms the court and the police of that volatile nation, it falls into oblivion with the modes of the season. Even comedy, which perhaps has more numerous combinations, in the proportion that the ridiculous bears to the terrific in human character, yet even every principal comic emotion, pursuit, situation, or trick, has been exhausted in the many thousands of comedies, which Spain, France, and England have produced, without taking into the account other nations ancient and modern. The result is, that formal epics are abandoned for irregular lyrical narratives, while tragedy and comedy have given way to melodrame and pantomime.

Forensic oratory and parliamentary debating seem to be quite as much exhausted ; the great masterpieces of Greece, Rome, and England, together with some specimens in our country, have gone over all the great topics, exhibited all the masterly resorts of rhetoric, and nothing remains to make a debate endurable, but the accidental occurrence of some really powerful, momentary excitement ; which, however, is too often attempted to be raised by the mere feverish turbulence of partisans, while their insipid commonplaces, and mock attempts at dignity that neither they nor the subject possess, occasion their harangues to fall stale, flat, and unprofitable, on a tired, disgusted audience.

The evil, though carried to greater extent with us, is not confined to our country. The abuse is very great in England, and the public there seem equally tired of it ; and as the ministers in that country have a seat in one or the other house, it

falls with oppressive weight upon them. Indeed, we recollect a few years since, when a great many changes had been rung on the same question, though under the form of a different motion, being prolonged through many nights, that the Lord Chancellor seriously insinuated, that there seemed to be a determination to incapacitate his majesty's ministers for performing their duty during the day, by harassing them every night with a debate. There is an opinion on this topic, expressed in a posthumous letter of Lord Byron, which is by no means confined to him. After briefly describing, with admirable discrimination, some of the chief contemporary speakers, he concludes ; ' But among all these, good, bad, and indifferent, I never heard the speech which was not too long for the auditors, and not very intelligible, except here and there. The whole thing is a grand deception, and as tedious and tiresome as may be, to those who must be often present.'

Yet the aristocratic and arrogant habits of the British parliament keep down the evil in part ; it is only a chosen few, who have fought their way through many a combat, whom the majority will yawn at with forbearance. If a man unknown to fame, a mere prosing, jury-confounding arguer, or vain, tiresome country gentleman, or conceited cit, should attempt a display, he would be coughed and scraped down ; and all these classes, which dilate with impunity among us, would be compressed into silence.

Though to some we may appear to write with too much frankness, we apprehend that a majority of the nation will agree with us, and would be glad to have the proposition established ; that, speeches in Congress have increased, are increasing, and ought to be diminished. The House of Representatives are the natural, immediate guardians of the people,—but who are to guard the guardians? Undoubtedly there is more than one member of that important body, who would be startled at a charge of abuse against it. They indeed have their professed censors and tribunes, who are perpetually imputing corruption and abuses to other branches of the government. They are constantly smelling and winking, and on the eve of detecting some enormity. From the excessive salaries of the secretaries—(we must save our feelings by speaking strait forward in a parenthesis—the despicable, parsimonious stipend paid to the highest labor, and most intense anxiety, not equalling the gains of mediocrity in many of the ordinary

professions of life), from these splendid emoluments, down to the moderate, decent remuneration of the clerks, no winter escapes without some magnificent attempt at reduction, some huge effort at economy. Now we really believe our government in all its branches to be freer from abuses, than any other in the world ; and this arises from our having no ancient malpractices consecrated by time, no privileges radicated beyond the power of extraction ; and, besides, to its being subject to a publicity the most unsparing and uncontrolled. Yet we are equally of opinion, that in the abuses which do creep in, by far the largest and the most costly proportion is to be found in the legislative branch ; in the department occupied by the guardians and representatives of the people's rights.

We allude not now to the paltry considerations of their daily pay, of their expenses of printing, &c. &c., but to the evils produced by this pestilent abuse of debating. We ask the nation to judge between their representatives and us poor critics ; we ask men conversant with public affairs, to look back for a few sessions, and see how many great measures of national importance have been delayed, or are still postponed, by this vile prurience for debate. And if these questions are too general to be felt, we come to suffering individuals, with real or imaginary claims, who have journeyed from distant parts of the Union, wasted month after month in expectancy, and at last have been put off to another and another session, because there was no time for investigation !

This evil has gradually gained upon the Senate, until it is almost as much infected as the other house ; and the course is still more unwise in them. Surely they may disdain the poor display, the ignoble triumph of common disputation. When the smallness of their number, the independence, the bodies and interests represented, and the functions of which they constitutionally partake, are considered, we think it no exaggeration to say, that they are the most respectable parliamentary house in any government. True it is, a temporary shade has passed over them, but this, like other shadows, will leave no mark. If, then, this body would relinquish the superfluity of debate, their greater progress in public business would be a salutary check on the other house, and goad them to a more punctual and efficient discharge of public duty.

If any person should think these remarks unfounded, and

that this abuse of what Bentham would call *speechification*, does not exist, we refer him to the speeches of the members for any one session; he will see that they themselves are conscious of their offences, and that three out of four begin with an excuse, or some attempt to excite commiseration by complaints of ill health, but that their sense of public duty is so strong, that they will speak, though they sink under the effort. It would be something gained, if ill health could be considered as an excuse, or enforced as a disqualification. There is no aristocratic remedy, as in England, of scraping and coughing; but they connive at and bear each other out, having the same object in view; and there is no intrepid reformer to take the part of the nation, and ask them, Why do ye so?

The obvious remedy for the evil would be found by not publishing the speeches *in extenso*. Because, in most cases, it is not the effect of the speech in the house, that the debater thinks or cares about. His object is to get his speech into the newspaper, and besides its circulation in that shape, the printer, for a trifling fee, breaks up his endless columns into a dingy, pamphlet page; and these precious missives the member despatches to sundry of his constituents, who stare with pleasure at the efforts of their representative, and have their pride gratified in receiving a communication '*free*.' Were the postage demanded, most of them would be inhumed in the dead-letter office, and come back to that bourne, the general post office, whence they proceeded. If only the substance of the speech was given, the real arguments of the speaker stated, as there would be the three grains of wheat in the five bushels of chaff, a most salutary corrective would be applied, and the editor besides enabled to devote a large part of his paper to useful and entertaining miscellanies, and his readers would get a much clearer insight into public affairs.

But the printers also are partly interested in the abuse, as this great repository of words furnishes them matter, without the pains of selecting or originating more valuable materials; and, besides, the same types undergoing the easy evolution of change of column, and broken up into little octavo or duodecimo squads, are paid for by the garrulous member, for the purpose of being distributed as we have before mentioned; and this fictitious new edition gives its emolument. But the journal, by becoming more valuable, would in the end gain more by giving the abstract we have recommended, fairly stating all

the arguments, and omitting merely the excuses, the declamation, and the sad inanity of faded commonplaces. The public unquestionably would be better instructed, their passions would be less excited, and they would understand more clearly, and judge more wisely of the chief topics of national concern. In this manner one column would condense and rectify the bewildering confusion, that now spreads over four; while the journal would become brighter, more varied, more edifying, more valuable. The very appearance would be worth the alteration. We appeal to nine out of ten of the subscribers, to the metropolitan journals, during, and for some time after, a session of Congress; we ask them with what emotions they see those wide, folio pages of a desolating debate, unbroken, unvaried as a wild heath or interminable prairie, with no apparent resting-place, or object in relief, whether they are not glad to thank misery for a change, and hail with delight the appearance of one of those treatises in which '*Eho-che-nunga, the Madman*,' or '*Sho-mon-e-ka-sa, the Prairie Wolf*,' assents to the exterminating progress of civilization.

We repeat it, the common routine of parliamentary speaking is no longer tolerable. The forms of oratory are as much used and worn, as the epic, the tragic, or the comic. The evil we deplore is increasing; the nation must set their faces against it, insist on having their business attended to, and not trifled with in debates. There will still be ample space left in the caucus, or in the courts of the country. There, in serving as jurymen, from which none are exempt, we may submit to the hammerers, and splitters, and spinners, who satisfy litigants that they earn their fees by laboring in their vocation, and as quiet citizens be resigned to our fate, when our turn comes to hear law, justice, and equity 'so bethumped with words.' But the same individuals must not transfer the same habits into the halls of congress. Nothing, however, short of a general rising in public feeling, will intimidate the offenders, and produce a reform; because, though there are some who have a better sense of the matter, there are many among them, who, it would seem, from their simplicity, confined reading, and a social intercourse limited to very narrow circles, really think they are making a pretty display, and are quite unaware how jejune, tedious, and ridiculous these harangues appear to persons of larger experience. Let them inquire of some one who is willing to tell them the truth, and they will be astonished

to learn, like Molière's Bourgeois Gentilhomme, that in these labored discussions they have been most sadly prosing all the time.

We have already hinted at some mechanical checks, which it is in the power of the printers to interpose in behalf of the nation. But we have an idea, that whenever some original mind with adequate talent and sagacity, takes up this subject, that a great and favorable change may be produced by striking out an entirely different course, and M'Adamizing the worn-out, jolting path. We cannot go further now than throw out the hint, from the fear of being tiresome, a quality, which reviewers should bear in mind is not confined to speaking; and also from our plan being as yet imperfectly conceived; and because we may possibly be in a situation to attain the glory of introducing it ourselves. However, to put those whose eyes are still bandaged in the right direction to grope for it, we will refer them to the study of Franklin, who fortunately could not make a speech, yet not only enjoyed great influence from his wisdom, but produced most powerful effects on assemblies by the mode of illustration he adopted. Let them reflect on this subject, and see if they cannot invent a new style of persuasion, introduce a very eloquent if not oratorical method, and cause the abandonment of effete, exhausted practice. If none of them will take advantage of these suggestions, we shall be half tempted, from patriotic motives, to make the reformation ourselves; and, should we succeed, we should wish no higher claim to gratitude, than to have it inscribed on our tablet,—*He reformed the congressional mode of debating, so that it was compressed into one fourth of the space it formerly occupied.*

ART. VIII. *Lettres sur l'Angleterre*; par le BARON DE STAEL-HOLSTEIN. 8vo. pp. 428. Paris. 1825.

THE author of this work is the son of the celebrated female writer, with whose name we have so often had occasion to adorn our pages, and whose premature loss we so lately regretted. With her illustrious title, he seems also to have inherited some of her most valuable qualities, and exhibits already